

III. SUBSISTENCE

AGRICULTURE

241 Agriculture and fishing are the principal sources of Tukuna economy. If forced
[226] to, the Tukuna will go for some time without collecting wild fruits or hunting; but the complete lack of garden products and fish simply spells misery to them.

The garden patch, cleared and burned out of the virgin jungle, is as a rule made
[462] exclusively by the men, often in a communal work party, *usfuri*; but some widows,
[476] without masculine aid, clear the land and plant in the *caposira* or secondary jungle
[462] growth. Both sexes pile up the rubbish and burn it, whereas planting is carried
out exclusively by women and girls. The original instrument for felling trees was
[442] the stone ax, whose appearance no one now remembers, but which, according to
legend, the culture hero *dysi'* stole from the demon *toi'ta* [tu'v'ta] (see page 131).

The four species of major importance for the Tukuna are bitter manioc, *mandioca*
brava (*Manihot utilisima*), sweet manioc, *macaxera* (*M. aipi*),¹ maize, and yam,
cará (*Dioscorea* sp.).² Lacking any one of these four, the Tukuna have a bad time
of it, whereas the absence of other edible tubers, such as the sweet potato, and of
other plants like sugar cane, pineapple, peanut (*manduvi*),³ and so on, affects them
very little.

According to legend, a solitary old woman discovered both the tree which fur-
[773] nished *macaxera*-like fruits and the art of making manioc flat cakes, *beijú*s. On
learning the secret, the men felled the tree and ate up everything; only Deer kept
shoots and seeds in a basket (*vatu'*) of which the culture hero *dysi'* later robbed him
(see p. 131). For this reason the Tukuna refer to a cultivated plant as a pre-
Columbian possession by saying that "it first came in Deer's *vatu'*."

Formerly, only sweet manioc was known to them; apparently bitter manioc and
[777] the process of making manioc flour were introduced by the Neobrazilians.

In planting either variety of manioc, a woman goes ahead, armed with a long,
[442] heavy, rounded stake of wood with a sharpened point (about 140 cm. by 7 cm.),
with which she makes holes in the ground, a female companion trailing behind to
insert the plant slips into the prepared soil. This stake (*paye'i'a*), when not in
use, is kept under water near the entrance to the house or clearing, so that it will
not dry out and lose weight. It is removed and dried off only on the eve of planting.

Maize was not "in Deer's *vatu'*" but, according to legend, was given to the In-
243 dians by *aria'na*, a great coquette of the upper world, who brought it with her
[773] from one of the lower worlds, where she was once forced to sojourn against her
will. (See p. 112.)

The planting of maize, done preferably by men, is accompanied by a certain
[462] ceremoniousness that is not observed for any of the other plants. The kernels are
placed first of all in a gourd of water. The planter then takes a little of this water
in his mouth and sprays it over the kernels in order to make them more savory.

243 Until the plants reach a certain height he must submit to rigorous taboos. He
cannot go near the fire, or eat or even touch the following fish: *pirarucú* (*Arapaima*

¹ Commonly known in Brazil as *api*.—Trans.

² A tuber also known as *inhame*.—Trans.

³ *Arachis hypogaea*; commonly known as *amendoim*; T., tóti.

gigas), *tucunari* (*Cichla* sp.), *cachorra* (*Eynodon hydrocyon*, Cast.), or *araci* 243
(*Leporinus* sp.). These last two are forbidden because they eat leaves. The same 784
prohibition holds for the honey of the wild bee, *jandafra*, and for *muriua*, the edible
larvae of Coleoptera.

The planter of maize must not touch any fish stupeficient (*timbo*) or blood, or
any object the color of blood; if he should touch *urucú* or *genipapo*, the maize
would turn red or black. One day, an Indian who had planted maize brought me
a fish, a *tucunari*. Later, the leaves of the maize he had planted turned yellow. To
undo the evil effects of the broken taboo he had to wash his hands and arms with
envisa de matamá, because they had touched the fish, and had to bind his arms
and legs with strips of the same liana.

If a pregnant woman plants maize, the plant also becomes "enceinte," and it will (943)
produce twin ears.

Contrary to the statements of Tessmann's informants, these Tukuna cultivate 244
the peanut (*manduvi*) just as much as the sweet potato; of the latter they raise
two special types, one for the brewing of beer (*chicha*), one as a component of
curare. The cultivation of the first type is post-Columbian, according to some of
my informants, but the second is undoubtedly aboriginal.

They also say that a stunted type of sugar cane was "already in Deer's *vatu*." 249
The cane is little cultivated. To extract the juice it is crushed first with a club and
then twisted, in the way Tessmann has described.

The banana, today of considerable economic importance, is post-Columbian, but 245
its culture dates back several centuries. The most common varieties are *poi*
(large), *iru'* (small); and the *nyëëta'rë poi'* or guariba monkey banana, so called
because of its red color.

Even today the Tukuna do not plant either kidney beans or broad beans. The 244
malagueta pepper is of recent introduction; formerly only one type of pepper was
known—a small, round, yellow pepper called *mü'nëru* ("grasshopper's head";
më'ë, generic name of peppers).

Four other plants with edible roots are cultivated in the clearings: *e'ru* (*arid*;
Maranta lutea Jacq.), also cultivated by the Neobrazilians and formerly exten-
sively planted; *maikura'ki* (*maikura*, sweet) or *dya'matjina* (l.g. 1), the tubercles of
which have a sweet taste; *naki-ëane* ("penis of tapir"); said to be cultivated by
the *Kokúma* also; and *a'tatj*, which is occasionally planted by the Neobrazilians
of the region.*

Cotton (*të*) was formerly planted more widely than today, but now one finds 248
only a few isolated stands in the clearings, and many Indians no longer plant any
at all. Cotton fell into disuse after purchased cloth began to be used for the fem- [439]
inine apron, *tanga*, which was originally the main product of Tukuna weavers.
Other articles once made of cotton are now made of *tucum* fibers, such as bands
for arm and leg and the sling (*tipoiá*) for carrying children.

In 1941 I met with considerable difficulty in acquiring two spindles (*të-ëi'vanë**) 286
for the ethnographic collection at Belém do Pará. The shaft is topped by a small
knob; the whorl, of turtle shell (*tracajá*, turtle; *Podocnemis* sp.), or of wood, is [321]
placed on the shaft from above.

* Tessmann, p. 500.

* Only *arid* is identified.—Trana.

dyoi' Paints the Uaricána

dyoi' had invented the uaricána of paxubíña wood for the hair-plucking festival of the boy 539
Téku-kíra', painting it red with carajurá [*Arrebidas obico*]. One of the immortal companions, I don't know which, criticized the painting. "How should I paint it, then?" asked dyoi'. The other explained, "At the headwaters of the Igarapé de São Jerônimo there is a high bank with clays of all colors. It is soft, but you must not touch it with your hands; remove it by thrusting your blowgun into it so that the clay sticks in the bore!"

That very evening the two transported themselves to the spot mentioned, where dyoi' thrust his blowgun into all the clays of different colors, each time to the depth of a handbreadth. On returning home, he reamed the clay out with a cleaning rod, and then painted the uaricána anew.

The taboo which surrounds this instrument is concentrated in the appearance [734] of this paint."

The Present Status of dyoi' and e'pi

At last dyoi' and e'pi decided to part, and so they went away—dyoi' to the west and e'pi to the east. But dyoi' could not readily find the west, and at night he secretly reversed the earth so that e'pi remained in the west, while he himself remained in the east. No one ever saw dyoi' again.

A long time ago a Tukuna journeyed to the rising sun, where he arrived at dyoi's house. He entered but did not succeed in seeing dyoi'. Wherever he looked he saw only his own image, because the walls of the house were made of mirrors. dyoi' sent word for him to go back, since he did not want to see him nor did he wish to be sought out.

Probably this tale has as its underlying basis the visit of some Indian in the mirrored salon of some governmental palace where he was denied the audience [777] requested of the governor.

Version collected in 1929.—In connection with the tale related above "Captain" Felix in 1929 brought to my attention the following episode.

Later, the two brothers began to quarrel and argue over the division of the world, disputing which of them should receive the east and which the west. Ipi demanded absolutely that he should go down the Solimões (east) and left for that region with his followers; but while he slept, dyoi' turned the world about so that Ipi and his people remained in the west, whereas dyoi' and his people remained in the east, as he had wished. dyoi' lives in the land of the rising sun, beyond the sea, in a place called mu'ruapi. ngutapa and tatarui are with him, also, but no mortal can ever reach there. In ancient times a few came close enough to see mu'ruapi from afar, but when they came nearer, everything turned into flowering bushes.

On the left bank of the upper Igarapé de São Jerônimo, almost two days' canoe 773
trip above the farthest Tukuna settlement, there is a very old plantation. Calixto 778
daueru'kí used to call this place bu-ë (from bu, child) because it was believed to have once been the dwelling of nu'/tapa, where dyoi', e'pi, and their sisters appeared in this world. Generally, however, the Tukuna call this plantation taivegi'ne, which was the name of dyoi's house. According to the Tukuna, one may still see there the remains of very ancient posts belonging to the house and to the fence with the platform upon which the brothers waited for the jaguar that had devoured nu'/tapa.

The place where the two caught the giant caiman was also pointed out to me. Not far above this spot the Igarapé varé-kí ("Girl Creek") empties from the right. There in ancient times the celebrants of a puberty ceremony once took the virgin to her bath after the depilation, as was the custom. When she dived into the

"See legend, "Taboos and the Breaking of the Uaricána Taboo."